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INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE OF PUPILS.  
ITS PRESENT STATUS IN ENGLISH-SPEAKING COUNTRIES.

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There were exceptional difficulties to be overcome in establishing international pupils' correspondence in England, for there was no central educational organization to take up the movement. It was, first of all, necessary to interest the publisher of some journal, in order to give the movement publicity. In January, 1897, it was announced that Mr. W. T. Stead, editor of the *Review of Reviews*, London, had been favorably impressed with the idea, and was willing to accept, exchange, and publish names of prospective correspondents. The response was encouraging, one hundred names being immediately sent in with requests for French correspondents. The number of participants increased at a satisfactory rate, as is shown by the fact that in the first four years the London bureau placed into communication with foreigners 2,887 boys and 1,613 girls, a total of 4,500 pupils. In addition, many adults were registered. Since 1901 the rate of increase has been steady, but not very rapid. Exact figures cannot be obtained, but approximately they are as follows: February, 1901, to February, 1902, 2,400 correspondents; February, 1902, to February, 1903, 2,300 correspondents; of whom 2,000 were children, and 300 adults. The number of schools represented grew from six in February, 1897, to 130 in February, 1902. The greatest numbers were registered in the months of December, March, and June. The number of schools represented in 1903 is not accessible. Even far-away Australia has sent in names, although the exchange of letters between that country and Europe must of necessity be at long intervals, on account of the great distance.

Since 1901 England has provided comparatively few supporters of the system. Professor Karl Markscheffel, of the "Grossherzogliches Realgymnasium" in Weimar, in his pamphlet, *Der internationale Schülerbriefwechsel*, attributes this lack of interest to the depressing influence of the Boer war. If he is right, there should be at present an increase in the number of English

correspondents. Miss Lawrence, in *Comrades All*, regrets the apathy of the English teachers, and urges them to enter personally into correspondence with teachers in other countries. She writes:

If we could induce teachers themselves to enter into correspondence with foreign teachers, their disinclination would soon disappear. For a teacher coming in contact with his fellows abroad, enthusiastic and practical as they generally are, could not but feel himself helped and sustained by the similarity of interests.<sup>1</sup>

M. Mieille also believes in the value of such relations. He writes to the *Practical Teacher*:

No teacher will contradict me, I feel sure, when I say that, from the very nature of our duties, we incur the risk of narrowing our sympathies and even sensibilities to the small world wherein we move, sway, and command. International correspondence is a means—than which no better, no readier at hand, and no easier—of keeping in touch with the outside world; of procuring ourselves the indispensable *courant d'air* which is to sift our minds. It opens to the teacher a wide field of self-culture. He gains from it the gifts of wide sympathy and the larger insight into human nature that, as was said above, are essential to the right exercise of the teaching profession. It facilitates to him the comprehension of the foreign mind, the foreign literature and civilization. Last, not least, from those familiar talks with a fellow-teacher, from the exchange of books, of professional experiences, etc., that will result therefrom, the teacher will derive new modes of thought, will even perhaps evolve new methods, and in the end benefit himself as well as his pupils.

As England could not satisfy the demand for correspondents, French and German teachers turned to America. Gaston Mouchet published an article in *Education*, while a German, Professor P. Thiergen, contributed a similar article to the *SCHOOL REVIEW* (January, 1899). These articles aroused the interest of Americans, and in a short time numerous addresses had been sent to the central office in Leipzig.

Previous to this time individual teachers had introduced this system, first of whom was Mr. Thomas A. Jenkins, then professor of the Romance languages in Vanderbilt University, now in the same department in the University of Chicago. He was followed by Professor Edward H. Magill, of Swarthmore College, Swarth-

<sup>1</sup> *Comrades All*, No. 1, p. 10.

more, Pa. After the publication of M. Mouchet's article, the attention of the Modern Language Association was called to it, and a committee of four was appointed to make an investigation. In 1899 this committee made a satisfactory report, and five additional members were appointed. The central bureau was located at Swarthmore College.<sup>1</sup> In 1900 the committee again reported, and was continued without change.

In 1901 11 universities, 7 colleges, 4 high schools, and 31 private individuals, representing in all 590 correspondents, reported to Professor Magill. Of these 590 persons, 321 requested French correspondents, 257 German, 11 Italian, and 6 Spanish.

An encouraging feature of the system is the fact that a large number of persons wished to continue the correspondence after they left school. Miss Lawrence writes:

Amongst the number of letters which were received directly after the first announcement in 1897, were many appeals from young clerks, ladies who had left school, but desired to continue their language studies, people who wanted to know something about their neighbors on the continent, and so on. Mr. Stead was, therefore, obliged to add an adult branch to the scheme.<sup>2</sup>

And a North American teacher writes, November 13, 1902:

Seit ich vor nunmehr 3 Jahren mich zuerst an Sie wandte, hatten Sie die Güte, über 120 meiner Schüler mit Adressen zu versehen. Viele haben seitdem die Schule verlassen, doch nach genauer Nachforschung bin ich in der angenehmen Lage, Ihnen mitteilen zu können, dass die Mehrzahl meiner Abiturienten auch nach dem Verlassen der Schule ihre Korrespondenz fortsetzen. Zwischen manchen deutschen und amerikanischen Schülern haben sich die Beziehungen im Laufe der Zeit geradezu ideal gestaltet; aber auch die, die nur fünf oder mehr Briefe während des Jahres erhalten, bleiben nicht ohne wertvolle Anregungen.<sup>3</sup>

The need of a bond uniting the thousands of correspondents in the different countries was soon felt, and in 1901 the first issue of *Comrades All* appeared, published in London, largely at the expense of Mr. Stead. This first number is worthy of note. In a splendid introduction Mr. Stead gives his reasons for pro-

<sup>1</sup> Teachers wishing to register pupils should address Professor Magill.

<sup>2</sup> *Comrades All*, No. I.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, No. III, p. 27.

moting international correspondence. As the editor of a great journal, which is read the world over, he is not primarily interested in the pedagogical value of the movement, but in the effect it will have on international relations, in removing narrow-minded racial prejudices, and creating a bond of sympathy between members of nations that once considered each other hereditary enemies. He writes:

The doctrine that a good Briton should be taught from his infancy to fear God and hate a Frenchman like the very devil, which was laid down by Lord Nelson, would find little acceptance among those who have discovered how very much like themselves Frenchmen are. One great value of the interchange of letters is that you discover that the schoolboys and schoolgirls in every country are perplexed by the same difficulties and make the same mistakes; and a consciousness of similarity in blundering often tends more to sympathy than an ideal perfection which admits of no mistake. What I should like to set as an ideal before everyone who takes part in this international correspondence is that they should endeavor to find out on how many points they agree with each other, and on how many points they differ, with the object, not of quarreling upon the points of difference, but of finding points of agreement, and of understanding why they differ.<sup>1</sup>

Easter, 1903, the third number of *Comrades All* appeared. It has a department for each language, contains articles by the leaders of the movement in England, the United States, Germany, and France, a collection of the best letters that were written by members of the organization, and a list of prizes awarded for the most interesting letters.

Unfortunately, owing to lack of financial support, it will probably be impossible for Mr. Stead to continue the publication of this annual.

The objection has frequently been urged that this correspondence will consume too much time on the part of the students, and energy on the part of the teacher. Several who have tried it have denied this, but especially convincing is the statement by Mr. Jean Buhner, as printed in the *Perthshire Constitutional and Journal*, May, 1902, in a report of the proceedings of the Scottish Modern Languages Association:

Mr. Buhner said, in connection with the Perth Academy, when he was first asked, in the spring of 1897, to join in the movement, he first hesitated,

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, No. I, p. 3.

but after receiving the first report from Professor Hartmann, he brought the matter before his pupils in the advanced classes, and almost all the girls took it up. That was at the end of 1897. Ever since the girls in the highest classes were members of the international correspondence classes. During the last few months he had the pleasure of sending in twenty-one names of adult students who attended the evening continuation-classes. Altogether there had been sent in about ninety names and addresses since November, 1897. Of those who took up the correspondence from the beginning he was glad to say that he knew of only four who had dropped. The others were still keeping it up, and he thought were as much interested in it as ever. What were the aims of international correspondence? To promote education, instruction, and friendship; and the benefits derived from this system were numerous indeed. Comparatively few of the many lovers and students of modern languages were able to go to Germany or France, and the next best thing, he thought, to actual residence abroad was this correspondence. Here the correspondent had an opportunity of bringing his knowledge into practice, here he found a direct connection with one who spoke and wrote the language, and here he got a regular intercourse and discussion of things up to date. Facts about certain customs and manners which he never could understand from his book, and which seemed strange and incomprehensible, were explained, and he penetrated into the culture and the spirit of another people. If both partners were serious in their correspondence, they would vie with each other in bringing out the good points, not only of their school, but of their town and their country, and then the correspondence becomes not only a propaganda of their language, but also of their country. The correspondence helped to make the study of language in schools less dry and monotonous, and less of a drudgery. Pupils always looked forward to their next letter. They learned a good many words they never got from books nor heard in the class. If they intended going abroad, they would know to whom to apply, and would get information and help from their friend, while on arriving they would feel themselves less lonely, knowing they had at least one friend to turn to in any difficulties. Terrible evils and difficulties were at first prognosticated both on the side of parents and teachers. Teachers thought the pupils might bring the schools into bad repute, and that they might write things about the teachers that would do much harm. Parents objected for fear of contaminating their children. But all this proved a mistake. One of the rules was that the teacher ought to supervise the correspondence as far as possible. Indeed, the correspondence would prove a success-only if the teachers took a lively, active interest in it. Proceeding, Mr. Buhner said it was precisely because of the crowded condition of the class work that this system afforded a relief instead of giving an added burden to bear. No time whatever need be occupied with the correspondence in class hours, but the students should carry it on themselves. An occasional letter of special interest or amusing errors might be read in the class. The cor-

respondence, however, did not only go on during the school tenure, but during the holidays and after the pupils had left school, and led to friendships and business relations, and was a long source of pleasure and profit to all those who were thus engaged. He could say from personal experience that correspondence did not burden the teacher, but made his work much lighter and more interesting.

Mr. Magill, of Swarthmore College, Pennsylvania, who is now chairman of the American committee, writes :

Teachers often say that their hours for class instruction are so few and so crowded that they have not time to introduce this correspondence. It is precisely because of this crowded condition of the class work that this system affords a relief, instead of giving an added burden to bear. No time whatever need be occupied with the correspondence during the recitation hours, but the students of different nationalities being once introduced to each other, and started in the work, they carry it on themselves, without aid from their teachers, receiving all needed assistance from each other's criticisms and corrections. This is not mere theory, but practice, as I have observed it in my classes from year to year. An occasional letter of special interest or amusing errors, made in attempts at a foreign tongue, may occasionally be read in class, as a variation of the monotony of what is sometimes too dull and tedious; and this can be done without at all exposing the names of the writers of such letters, if so desired.

Professor Ernst Wolf, of the Saginaw (Mich.) High School, is quoted as writing :

Die dank dem internationalen Schülerbriefwechsel tatsächlich erzielten Erfolge haben mich, der ich anfangs der Sache sehr skeptisch gegenüberstand, zu einem begeisterten Anhänger der Einrichtung gemacht. Das Interesse wird durch sie in hohem Masse gestärkt. Die Deutschen und das Deutsch sind meinen Schülern dadurch unzweifelhaft menschlich, ja persönlich näher gerückt worden. Sie sind jetzt zur Überzeugung gekommen, dass die deutsche Sprache nicht bloss eine Schulsprache ist, die nur zum Lehren and Lernen taugt, sondern dass diese Sprache der ihnen gleichalterigen und geistesverwandten jungen Leute im fernen Deutschland zum Ausdruck von Gefühlen und Gedanken dient, die ihren eigenen merkwürdig ähnlich sind. Bislang liess sich das Verhältniss meiner Schüler zur deutschen Sprache prägnant charakterisieren durch das Zitat : "Doch eine Würde, eine Höhe entfernte die Vertraulichkeit." Das Bücherdeutsch muss ja naturgemäss eine derartige Wirkung haben. Es ist also das Persönliche, das in der Einrichtung liegt, was sie wertvoll macht. Und sagt nicht der grosse Pädagoge Goethe : "Persönliches muss herrschen !"

Other letters affirm the same :

## THE GRAMMAR SCHOOL, PORTSMOUTH.

DEAR SIR: I send you another list of twenty-three boys who wish for French correspondents and two who desire to write to German boys. Not only do their letters arouse the interest of the boys in many things other than language, but it gives them something to talk about, and they seem quite willing to do so, with very little encouragement from the teacher. I am convinced that much good will result from this correspondence. Even if it only tended—as it assuredly does—to make a pupil look upon French as a “living language,” in fact, a very lively one, it would induce me to give it my hearty approval and humble support.

G. S. CONRAD.<sup>1</sup>

Der Briefwechsel hat in der Schule das grösste Interesse für das Deutsche erweckt. Die Schüler erwarten mit der grössten Ungeduld die Antwort auf ihre Briefe. Seit meine Schüler den Briefwechsel angefangen, haben sich meine Klassen um 60% vergrössert, und dieses verdanke ich zum grossen Teile dem internationalen Schülerbriefwechsel.<sup>2</sup>

Mr. F. Baumann, of Torgau, makes a remark that might give food for thought. After referring to a Canadian student, who had neglected to answer a letter directed to him, and who refused to make any explanation of his lack of courtesy, although inquiries were made, he writes:

Die Briefe von Amerika liessen überhaupt viel zu wünschen übrig. Zwar sprachlich korrekt, waren sie doch dem Inhalt nach von sehr geringem Werte. Man musste sich wundern, dass Primaner so gutmütig waren, den Briefwechsel mit Leuten von der geistigen Bildung eines Tertianers eine Zeit lang fortzusetzen.

The other side of the question is presented when an American teacher writes:

Letztes Jahr sandte ich Ihnen auch einige Adressen, und Sie setzten diese in Verbindung mit deutschen jungen Leuten. Diese Korrespondenz war nicht sehr rege, und es scheint mir fast, dass es mehr die Schuld der deutschen Korrespondenten war, als die der hiesigen.

The letters written by the pupils are very interesting. The principal subjects discussed are, in the order of their popularity: the person of the writer—his occupation and special interests; the school—description of the buildings, grounds, and the daily routine of work; the home town; games; interesting localities near the home of the writer. Those written in the mother-tongue of the pupil are very good; the pupil feels that the

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 26.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, No. III, p. 27.



honor of his school, and, to a certain extent, of his country, is at stake, and will do his best. The attempts at the foreign language would be considered good by anyone who has ever tried to teach German composition. Of course, there are many mistakes; but even the mistakes of a French or German child, when he attempts to write English, may be turned to good account. Thus, if a French boy writes "the beautifuls trees," and refers to the "house" as "she;" or if a German boy places an infinitive at the end of a sentence, and writes of an apple as "he," certain peculiarities of foreign idiom can be impressed on the class in such a manner as no grammar rule can ever accomplish.

As an illustration of how such a correspondence may begin, the following is quoted from a letter written by a Massachusetts boy. In his first letter, written in English, he tells that he is sixteen years old, and has had two years of German. Then he describes his home, and arranges for an exchange of postage stamps. In the second letter he makes a courageous attempt at German, which results as follows:

MEIN LIEBER FREUND.

Ich habe Ihren Brief empfangen und sollte er ehe geantwortet haben, aber da ich krank war, konnte ich nicht ehe schreiben. Ich danke Ihnen sehr für die Postmarken, und werde Ihnen später andere senden. Die Zeitung, die ich Ihnen auch sende, hält ein Bild unseres Fussball Gesellschafts ein, das vielleicht Sie interessieren wird. Ihr Brief war so ganz richtig, dass ich er nicht zurücksenden werde. . . . Nun werde ich etwas um meine Familie sagen. Mein Vater is ein Bauende von Häusern, und ist auch Präsident des Geheimen Rates der Stadt Waltham. Ich habe auch eine Mutter, und eine Schwester, der dreizehn Jahre alt ist. . . .

The rest of the letter is in English. Every experienced teacher can readily see how valuable a means of instruction this letter must have been when it was returned from Germany with the proper corrections at the hands of the foreign correspondent.